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ABSTRACT

Educators need to teach the lessons of the Holocaust in order to demonstrate the consequences of racism carried to its most frightful extreme. This paper highlights autobiographies, diaries, journals, and first person narratives in children's and young adult libraries that can be included in library programs. Textbooks used in American schools are faulted on three major counts: (1) the Holocaust is not given the treatment it deserves; (2) students are not provided with lessons from the Holocaust; and (3) examples are not drawn upon to enhance instruction. When selecting children's literature titles for an elementary history unit, librarians should: select as many primary sources as possible; represent all perspectives; provide a good collection of nonfiction; and maintain a careful balance between enjoying literature and using material for data. Schools are moving away from skill-based reading programs to literature-based, whole language programs. Staff development programs on any thematic unit should include teacher-librarian book discussion groups. Holocaust survivors speaking to a class are highly effective in the upper grades. Examples of these activities are provided. (Contains 22 references.) (AEF)

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ED 399 955

Children's Literature and the Holocaust

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In a world of racism, "ethnic cleansing," and never ending battles of hate, educators at all levels need to teach the lessons of the Holocaust. The tragedy of the Holocaust can well demonstrate the consequences of racism carried to its most frightful extreme.

The purpose of this session is to highlight the use of autobiographies, diaries, journals, and first person narratives in elementary through young adult school libraries. Diaries and other such writings capture the routines, events, and powerful feelings that textbooks, biographies, and other nonfiction often exclude.

Children need to feel secure in their world and have hope; not frightened by graphic descriptions of brutality. Stories of children who were hidden, those who managed to escape to relative freedom, those who lived through years of suffering, those who lived by their own wits, and the children who perished are the titles that will be highlighted. Examples of librarian-teacher cooperative strategies, suggested sources of resource materials, and interchange with the audience will be encouraged.

1995 will be the year to commemorate the end of World War II. Librarians need to be prepared to participate in the anticipated new interest in this event. This session will enable school librarians to have the necessary resources to meet patrons' needs.

> "Tell your children of it and let your children tell their children and their children another generation."
> Book of Joel, Chapter 1, Verse 3

Introduction

Teaching and reading about the Holocaust are among the most difficult responsibilities that we as educators face. The unmentionables and unexplainables are troublesome for adults to make some sense of, yet how do we approach this delicate issue in our public schools and libraries? Can we teach this horrific event without frightening our students, or do we pass over it and hope the subject will be covered at some later time by some other teacher at some other school? Where do librarians fit into the scheme of things and how can they be innovators and facilitators in enriching our curriculum, our collections, and thereby our patrons?

Despite the popularity of Spielberg's *Schindler's List* and the book by Thomas Keneally (that has sold well over half-million copies), Lois Lowry's award-winning *Number the Stars* (over 160,000 copies), and the ever-popular and brilliant *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl* (16 million copies in over 50 languages), revisionists gain notoriety and credence through advertisements, publications, and lecture programs. In response, the Nation-al Council of Teachers of English passed a resolution in 1993 affirming "that students should read and discuss literature on genocide and intolerance within an historically accurate framework with special emphasis on primary source material."[1]

They noted that in a world of increasing racial, ethnic and religious hostility, education was the most powerful tool to help students perceive victimization and to fight intolerance. Countless communities throughout the world are planning commemorative activities in observance of the end of World War II. How can librarians fit into these activities and approach the topic we all would like to avoid--the Holocaust?

Present Environment

Our curriculums are still dominated by basal readers and textbooks. The basal readers are highly structured and offer self-control-led vocabularies by writers who have presup-posed their intended audiences' knowledge, interests and backgrounds.

Some basals have increased selections from the best of contemporary children's literature; "however the selections are often treated as a minor component of the program, a chance to practice the skills taught in the workbooks and skill exercises."[2] The homogenizing and editing of the material often results in little resemblance to the original source. And, their treatment of the Holocaust is virtually ignored. Our textbooks on all levels of instruction from

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elementary through high school offer little more than a brief touching on this subject. One study of forty three American history textbooks of major publishers found none adequately covered the Holocaust.

Only four devoted forty to seventy- lines to the Holocaust, thirty four titles provided one to forty lines, twenty six failed to devote even a separate paragraph on the subject, and five did not contain a single line.[3] Another study exam-ined nine popular elementary textbooks and found: (1) there was a total of nine sentences that dealt directly with the Holocaust, (2) only one book included a separate paragraph on the topic, (3) there were no references to non-Jewish victims, (4) only one book used the word Holocaust, and (5) none had suggested reading titles.[4] The coverage in high school history, sociology and geography texts was not encour-aging either. Not even the Anne Frank diary made it into the suggested reading lists in many of the texts since no Holocaust titles were included. Of seventeen major history titles examined for grades seven to twelve, only five had more than thirty one lines, with eighty five being the most generous. None attempted to describe the concentration camps and consis-tently ignored any aspect of the survivors.[5]

Textbooks used in American schools are faulted on three major counts: (1) the Holocaust is not given the treatment it deserves in its own right, (2) students are not provided with lessons from the Holocaust, and (3) "they do not draw upon examples...which would enhance the instruction in concepts of the various disciplines they are attempting to teach."[6]

Using Literature

We know how meaningless memorization of facts and events are, yet most textbooks offer little more than that. Using literature in the history curriculum, as pointed out by Brown and Abel, can serve several important purposes of interest to librarians:

(1) To present a broad historical context, rather than just the facts.

(2) To provide students with insights (daily life patterns, attitudes, values, etc.) of those who lived during that era.

(3) To get students to empathize with the literary characters.

(4) To have students compare their personal societal values to those in the literature they are reading.[7]

"Social science concepts placed within an historical setting can provide a unifying structure that is both developmentally appropriate and intellectually invigorating."[8]

When selecting children's literature titles for an elementary history unit, librarians should consider:

(1) Select as many titles as possible that are primary source (autobiographies, diaries) or are well written materials based on primary sources (biographies and other non-fiction narratives).

(2) All perspectives during the period are represented.

(3) In addition to historical fiction, provide a good collection of nonfiction, such as songs, poetry, speeches, letters, diaries, etc.

(4) A careful balance between enjoying literature in-and-of-itself vs. using the material for data on the historical period must be found. "The process should never be so onerous that the joy of reading is diminished."[9]

So much of what students use from our libraries is based on the recognition that reading original source material is available for most any reading ability and that reading literature can cross through many curriculums. The whole language approach (often referred to as literature-based learning) which is gaining popularity throughout public schools, challenges libraries to provide a wealth of appropriate materials that can be read by a wide variety of students. Personally, I am happy to see that my own children are often supplied with book lists prepared by teacher-librarian teams. Library materials are now central to instructional goals.

The whole language movement is based on three blocks: that reading is learned by using actual texts in full, that reading is a part of learning language, and learning about language is multifaceted. "Children learn best when language is whole, meaningful and functional. The language of literature becomes the heart of reading and writing programs; thus, whole language and literature are inseparable."[10]

The American Association of Publishers' (AAP) Reading Initiative Program has gained popularity and success as interest in literature-based programs increases. Their recent survey of over 5,000 elementary school principals in twenty one states indicates that schools are moving away from skill-based reading programs and 60% of principals viewed their reading programs as "literature-based, inte-

grated language arts or whole language programs."[11]

In June 1993, the American Associ-ation of School Librarians issued a statement on the role of school library media specialists in the whole language approach. They noted the following points as essential to an effective program:

(1) The schedule of the library media center be flexible.
(2) Students not be limited to only teacher-selected materials.
(3) Students should choose from a non-graded, wide collection in a variety of formats that reflects personal interests.
4) Multidisciplinary approaches are encouraged.
(5) Teacher and librarians share responsibility for reading and information skills instruction.
(6) Teacher and librarians cooperate on selecting materials and collaborate on learning activities.
(7) On-going staff development is critical to whole language instruction.[12]

Autobiographies

Children are fascinated about the past. "Primary sources constitute the richest vein of all materials on the history of childhood. Perhaps the most valuable primary materials...are children's diaries. The best of them reveal the secret thoughts, frustrations, likes and dislikes, aspirations and fears that illuminate the character of the diary writer."[13]

Autobiographies (and biographies) allow the reader to form a bond with the author. "You watch the person grow, learn, achieve, or even fail. And because what you're dealing with is real, there's a special weight to it."[14] The recent popularity of *Zalata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo* (Viking, 1994) indicates that first-person accounts of horrendous situations written by youngsters can have an impact on the reading world.

In an article about holocaust books in the classroom, it is noted that what occurred must be experienced by the reader, not taught. This means abandoning the history textbooks and embracing children's authors who share the stories of 1933 to 1945.[15] As Deborah Dwork in *Children With A Star* points out, children with far less maturity and self esteem than adults had to deal with the policy of differentiation, such as wearing the yellow star; the segregation from other Germans; isolation from schools, libraries, parks, etc.; and ultimately for most, death. "It is from the children...that we can learn how they, without experience and perspective, understood and operated within this new and bizarre world with its new and bizarre rules."[16]

Perhaps a sixth grader's written report about a Holocaust narrative said it best: "I loved this book because it sees through the eyes of this person. I never knew how hard peo-ple had it. The book is so real."[17]

Library Activites and Strategies

Staff development programs on any thematic unit should include teacher-librarian book discussion groups. The Association of American Publishers Reading Initiative and the Virginia State Reading Association cosponsored a Teachers as Readers Project in thirty six sites. Funds were provided to purchase children's books and professional literature which ultimately were added to school library collections. Each group agreed to read and discuss at least four children's books and one professional book within six months. All participants kept a log of their reactions. In describing the success of the programs, it was noted that participants indicated in their journals their thoughts, issues, and discussion questions. "That's really what we want children to do with literature in the classroom. We want them to bring their thoughts as a reader to the text."[18]

Professor Barbara Lassman described a seven part Holocaust program for school children:

(1) Without prior notice about the Holocaust being the next study unit, the class was divided in half: those with blue eyes and all others. One group received cookies. Discussion followed about their feelings and defi-nitions of discrimination. Students were encouraged to discuss with fam-ily their views on prejudice and discrimination.
(2) The second class began with students sharing their family discussions from the previous night. All then drew and wore Star of David arm bands. The meanings of curfews, ghettos, etc. were discussed, culminating with reactions about being singled out as a particular group.
(3) Next was a study of the economic, social and political environment in Germany.

(4) Class time was devoted to Hitler's life and how he gained the support to carry out his programs.

(5) Concentration camps were covered, keeping in mind the sensitivity of the students. Emphasized were stories of bravery and resistance.

(6) A class was spent huddled together in a closet while excerpts from Anne Frank's diary were read, mostly about her feelings.

(7) The conclusion of this unit was a dimly lit room and an unlit candle. Students were asked to share their feelings. Some drew pic-tures, some wrote stories and others composed poems.

Throughout this program, parental support was high via sharing experiences, photos, and memorabilia.[19]

A well organized and unique program is Facing History and Ourselves, based in Brookline, Massachusetts. It is an interdisciplinary, teacher training organization whose target is indifference, racism and prejudice. Founded in 1976, over 30,000 educators, clergy, students and community leaders have participated in their training workshops, which has resulted in reaching over a half-million students of all social, economic, ethnic and racial backgrounds. Introductory three-day workshops (often held all over the world) help in understanding the program's objectives, methodology and materials. Institutes provide the latest scholarship and to support educators already using the program. Inservice staff development seminars and community adult education programs are available. Each year, a conference in Boston brings together scholars and teachers. They have several excellent publications, a newsletter and even a lending library of books, magazines and videos.

Focusing on the Armenian Genocide and Nazi Holocaust the questions and issues faced are abuse of power, mass conformity, how doctors, nurses and teachers participated in such movements; why lawyers worked to deny basic human rights; why some people defied that state; and the consequences of denial, avoidance and revision of history. Facing History uses inquiry, analysis and interpretation to help students draw the universal lessons of these events; try to assimilate multiple perspectives; think about ethical behavior, and to discuss prejudice with students from many diverse backgrounds. It has been written about extensively in the media and praised throughout the world has a highly effective program with meaningful results.

The Jewish Labor Committee cospon-sors a Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Teach-er Training Program, now in its tenth year. Cosponsored with the American Gatherin /Federation of Jewish Holocaust Survivors (which provides scholarships for teachers) and the American Federation of Teachers (which recruits teachers), this three-week program brings scholars and teachers together. Participants first stop in Poland to visit Jewish historic sites and concentration camps. In Israel, visits include Yad Vashem, Masada and Hebrew University. An annual teachers' conference in Washington, DC includes the exchange of teaching experiences of the Holocaust and Jewish resistance. A large part of the cost of this program is underwritten by scholarships. As a result of this program, participants have been requested to be a trainer for youth offenders found guilty of bias crimes; developing interdisciplinary curriculum projects and inservice workshops; revising city and state curriculum guides; coordinating trips to the U.S. Holocaust Museum; establishing Holocaust research scholarship funds; video and audio recording of survivors; and teaching adult education courses. An Oregon high school English teacher who participated in this program moved to a new school which had no Holocaust books. She convinced them to purchase a classroom set of *Night*. "Although that may sound like a small accomplishment, I feel it's a great victory. 170 sophomores will have the opportunity to read, discuss and write about a novel that they never would have read."[20]

Holocaust survivors are highly effective in the upper grades. Before contacting that person directly, find out where they have spoken before and how their presentation went. Rabbis and Jewish groups in your area should be able to make recommendations. Authors such as Ruth Minsky Sender and Inge Auerbacher are excellent speakers for students to meet. A high school history teacher noted that when she first started teaching about the Holocaust years ago, student reactions to photographs were horror, disbelief and revulsion. Now, nothing seems to bother them. "Even hardened teenagers are affected by the personal lives of these people when they hear the stories from the survivors themselves. What will happen, I wonder, when the survivors are gone?"[21]

The U.S. Holocaust Museum, although rather new, has vast resources that may even be accessed by e mail. Materials include teach-

ing guidelines (why study the Holocaust, learning activities, selection guidelines), annotated bibliographies (by reading level and genre), a videography (by subject) and a directory of Holocaust organizations.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center's Mus-eum of Tolerance (Los Angeles) sponsored an exhibit. Remembering for the Future: Themes of Tolerance and Diversity in Children's Liter-ature. An excellent bibliography is available as well as a teaching resources kit.

Elie Wiesel in speaking about the importance of Holocaust education and the dif-ficulty of teaching about it, related how he first resisted telling the story and its lessons. He said, "You can either spread misfortune or curtail it. I teach the children. It's more than a matter of communicating knowledge. Whoever engages in this field becomes a messenger."[22]

Recommended Titles

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As The Waltz Was Ending. Butterworth, Emma Macalik. Four Winds (Scholastic), 1982.

Kindertransport. Drucker, Olga Levy. Henry Holt, 1992.

Young Moshe's Diary. Flinker, Moshe. Yad Vashem (Jerusalem), 1979.

Escape or Die. Friedman, Ina R. Addison-Wesley, 1982.

The Other Victims. Friedman, Ina R. Houghton-Mifflin, 1990.

Don't Say A Word. Gehrts, Barbara. McElderry (MacMillan), 1975 and 1986.

Pearls of Childhood. Gissing, Vera. St. Martin's, 1988.

The Endless Steppe. Hautzig, Esther. Crowell, 1968.

Remember Who You Are. Hautzig, Esther. Crown, 1990.

Mischling, Second Degree--My Childhood in Nazi Germany. Koehn, Ilse. Greenwillow (Morrow), 1977.

We Survived the Holocaust. Landau, Elaine. Watts, 1991.

Lydia, Queen of Palestine. Orlev, Uri. Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

Shanghai Passage. Patent, Gregory. Clarion, 1990.

The Upstairs Room. Reiss, Johanna. Crowell, 1972.

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Touch Wood--A Girlhood in Occupied France. Roth-Hano, Renee. Four Winds, 1988.

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